

KELSEY HOUSE,  
NEW HYDE PARK,  
NASSAU COUNTY,  
LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK.

HABS, NY-531.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

DISTRICT No. NY-5.

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Building Survey  
Lester B. Pope, District Officer.  
Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, N. Y.

"THE KELSEY HOUSE"

New Hyde Park, Nassau County, New York

Owner or Custodian

Jacob Wicks  
Lakeville Road near Hillside Avenue  
New Hyde Park, Long Island, New York.

Date of Erection

About 1818.

Builder

Edwin Willets

Present Condition

Dilapidated, partly burned, quite open to the weather.  
Present use, a storage for farm produce. Stands in a  
Long Island potato field.

Number or Stories

Two.

Materials of Construction

Masonry foundation; exterior and interior walls of wood;  
clapboard siding. Single hipped roof; no dormers;  
inside chimney.

Other Existing Records

None.

Additional Data

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REPORT OF THE HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
on the  
KELSEY HOUSE, LAKEVILLE ROAD,  
NEW HYDE PARK, LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK STATE  
(H.A.B.S. N.Y. 531)

The building stands in the potato fields west of Lakeville Road, a quarter of a mile north of the new Hillside Avenue, gutted by fire, with doors swinging open and broken windows half shuttered, a ghost of its former grandeur, importance, and life. The partly burned and ruined house is the fourth to occupy the site. The first as mentioned in the Documentary History of New York was the former Estate of Thomas Dongan, Royalist Governor of New York. The estate extended from Lake Success on Success Path, now Lakeville Road, to near what is now Hillside Avenue in New Hyde Park. It extended westward three-quarters of a mile. The New York City line passes through the tract. At the time of its origin, this was the dividing line between Flushing and Hempstead Townships. According to the printed copies of the Records of the Town of North and South Hempstead by Onderdonk, the part within the Flushing Township was given by Flushing Townsmen, this consisted of about 400 acres, and the part within the Town of Hempstead, about 200 acres or over, was given to Sir Thomas Dongan at a town meeting at Hempstead, November 12, 1684. This was the date of the original grant, although the matter was discussed at a town meeting a year prior; namely, December 9, 1683; it was not until the town meeting of August 21, 1685, that Capt. John Semans, Simon Sirring, John Smith, and John Jackson were chosen to go with the Governor and show him the bounds of the land. Copies of the original survey and records pertaining to this property are herewith attached.

According to the HISTORY OF LONG ISLAND by Thompson, Sir Thomas Dongan was commissioned as Governor September 30, 1682. He arrived August 25, 1683, landing on the east end of Long Island. Soon after his arrival he issued orders to his Sheriffs to convene the Freeholders of the Province in their several towns to elect deputies to meet him in general assembly on October 17, 1683, about 60 years from the time the Island of Manhattan was first occupied by civilized people; and thirty years after the popular demand therefor, the representation of the people met, and their self-established "Charter of Liberties" gave New York a place by the side of Virginia and Massachusetts. Dongan's commission was renewed, it seems, by King James II, June 10, 1686, but his instructions which are full and minute bear the date previously by May 29, 1686, and are referred to in his commission. He was released from office July 28, 1688, and returned to England in 1691.

According to the history, Governor Dongan had a Manor House in Staten Island, the house in Hyde Park being his farm and country estate. Hyde Park, the country estate, was disposed of after he left for England. Next it was the Country seat of Lieutenant and Acting Governor Clark who was Provencial Secretary of New York from 1703 to 1736. He later returned to England where he died and lies buried in the Cathedral of Chester.

The next tenant was Josiah Martin, who became the last Royal Governor of North Carolina, and died at Rock Hall, Lawrence, Long Island.

The property was probably conveyed to the Hon. George Duncan Ludlow, Justice of the N.Y. Supreme Court, and his brother Col. Gabriel Ludlow. He was a loyalist and became Royal Governor of New Brunswick, Canada. His house burned December 30, 1773, according to an article in the New Gazette: "At one o'clock last Thursday morning the house of the Hon. George Duncan Ludlow, at Hempstead Plains, took fire and burnt to the ground, with most everything therein, but, providentially, no lives were lost. The injury sustained cannot be less than 3,000 Pounds, for, besides furniture, plate, etc., a library worth 1,200 Pounds was entirely destroyed." Judge Ludlow immediately built a new house on the spot. The whole estate was forfeited by the "Act of Attainder" passed October 22, 1779. The Hon. George Duncan Ludlow was a gentleman of fortune, of a highly respectable family and extensive legal attainments. He as well as his brother was promoting the cause of the enemy, during the Revolution, and having thereby lost their estate, both were afterward provided for by the British government. The estate so confiscated was sold in November, 1784, to a different individual. Just who lived in the house for the next thirty-two years, is not known, but William Cobbett, a celebrated political writer and a political fugitive from England, took residence in the house in 1816, this is from "Keskachauge" or "The First White Settlement on Long Island" by Frederick Van Wyck. The house was again destroyed by fire May 26, 1817. Cobbett introduced the rutabaga plant or Swedish turnip, in this country, and wrote his English grammar here. He returned to England in 1819. The present and assumed to be fourth on the spot was built by Edwin Willits in 1818 or 1819. Just how long he lived

there is not known, but it was occupied by the Kelsey family who moved from the house in 1874, when he sold his property for real estate development--according to Mr. George C. Wicks, the present owner. It since has been occupied by others until 1922 when it was partly destroyed by fire. It seems this was the fate of all buildings on this site. From this time on, the building was abandoned and used as a store house for farm produce.

The present building belongs to the same design-group as the Isaac Snedecker House and the Carman-Irish House, both of Hempstead and which date around that period. The trims, the doors, the stairs, especially the newel post, the upstairs mantels, all these attest the influence of New York tradition of the Post-Colonial period.

At an early date the roof, which was originally of a double slope, was found to be flat. Leaks and rotting of shingles made an alteration necessary. The present single slope roof is built up on top of the old framing with some of the old work still in place. The first floor mantels were altered in the 1880's to be the type of marble used so much in the city at about that time.

The front entrance and the main front porch were also changed, the latter having that complete misunderstanding of style unity that was common in the last century. The posts and arches are in decidedly Gothic detail, but the brackets are elaborately carved Corinthian of the most Classic pattern.

The service wing and the adjoining service building are

from the first part of this century. Neither have any architectural interest.

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The real value of the present remnant lies in the fine old staircase with its delicate balusters, fine newel post, and elaborate string ornament, the sweep of winding and carefully curved handrail. The beautiful doorways with their deeply cut trims and strong corner blocks, these are well worth study. The second floor windows show some of the delicacy of the original design while the two mantels on the second floor, though small, preserve the naive character so sought by present-day designers in the Georgian style.

In another year or so this building will be lost and except for this record with no tangible evidence to show of its grand scheme, its fine character, and that must have been of tremendous influence on the people who grew up in it, of taste, of quality, and of inspiration.

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Excerpts from the printed copies of the Towns of North and South Hempstead, by Onderdonk.

Page 419 in printed copy:

"Liber C, page 50"

At a Towne meeting held in Hampsted the neinth day of December in the year of our Lord Anno 1683 wee the Inhabitants of this Towne of ye Dutyfull Respects we owe to our Honoured Governor Sr Thomas Dongan have by our full vote given to our said Governor one or Two hundred Akers of Land as the place will allow off: bordering on the west End of the great plains to gether with one Right of Comonage in our Towneship: Recorded by ye order of ye Counstabell and overseers: by mee

Recorded by mee Fra: Chappell Clarke

Page 485 in printed copy

"Liber C, page 118"

At a publik Towne Meeting held in Hempsted The 12 daye of November 1684, it was by the inhabitants by a Mutiall and Joynt Consent ffreely given granter and confermed to the right hounerable Coronall Thoman Dongan Govenor his Baires and Asines for ever two hundred Ackors of woodland as it is Allredy layde

oute Joyneing on the west side with foure hundred Ackors given to the Govenor by the Town of Flushing runing ffrom the edge of the greate plaine to the hills neere suckses pond on the East side it is bounded by a path Commonly Called the great neck or suckses path runing as the path runs ffrom the plaine edge to an elbo in the path which is a bout three or ffoure Score rods ffrom the hils and thence to A Marked Tree that stands on the South Side of suckses pond the whole Tract off land having ye Seame bredth Att eht plaines as it doth on the hills.

Recorded by mee  
Josias Starr Clark

Page 490 in printed copy

"Liber C, page 123"

Att a Towne meting Held in Hempsted the 21 day of Agust in the yeare 1685 the Gift of two hundred ackors of Wood land formely given to the Govenor Coronall Thomas dongan was owned and confermed to him by the Inhabtants of Hempsted and Captin John semans, simon sirring, john smith, and John jackson was chosen to go and show him the bounds of it.

(the rest of the record is omitted because it does not deal with property, the next part copied is the description of the survey as found in the record following directly after the foregoing. The foregoing record was signed by Joseph Pettit Clark.)

Page 490 and 491 in the printed record

"Liber C, page 124"

Survaied and laid out for the Honourable Thomas dongan Govenor Generall of his Majestys Colony of New Yourk A Cartain tract of Land being situated and lying in the township of Hempsted on the Northwest of the Plains in queens county being knowne by the neame of (illegible) beginning at a marked tree on the west side of the Path that Gose to Madnons Neck by the egh of the Plaines and Runs in Length in wood by a line of marke trees North North west one degree thirty minite North by one hundred and thirtene Chains to suckses Pond and then in bredth upon the hils southwest and by south ten degree and thirty minits southardly one hundred and thirtene Chains to two whit oake trees Marked at a point of brush Land against fosters medow hallow on the Plains and then in bredth by the Plains North Est and by north ten degrees and forty five minits Estwardly sixty Chains to the first whit oke tree marked on the south side the Path the wholle being bounded to the North west by suckses pond and the hills to the southwest by flushing Common woods to the Est by Hempsted Plains and to the North Est by madnons Neck Path and the Land of (illegible) osburns containing in all six hundred and Eighten Ackers.

Performed this 24 day of agust 1685  
by me Phillip wels survair

EUGENE NOSTRAND  
Leader of Field Party  
Nassau County, New York

Approved *John B. Pope*  
District Officer, H.A.B.S., Pratt Institute, B.oklyn

*See Aug. 20. 1936  
THU*